# Nancy Graves

## Camels

Nancy Graves' sculptures are exacting and specific references to animate objects which exist in the world. The forms are those which are found in living camels; the decision to use materials which approximate the actual animal is unique.

By virtue of their animate quality and the gesture of interrupted motion, these works deal directly with perceptual problems of illusion and reality.

All realistic sculpture to scale has, in the past, alluded to a model. In making camels, however, the artist has abandoned traditional concepts in order to replicate a living form which is unaware of its function as model. Since there is no fixed (or posed) position which will approximate the final work, each camel comes into being only upon its completion by the artist. Each work alludes only to itself, and becomes its own illusion.

Their visual impact is the result of the artist's primary concern with the creation of surface detail and the immediacy of illusion. A sustained tension is established between the viewer's reaction to the "real" subject matter and his aesthetic awareness of the camels as sculptural objects.

Miss Graves' choice of subject matter reveals her personal and formal sensibilities. Why camels? "While it is obvious that *camel* is a vehicle to allow for the expression of my concerns (just as is the square for Albers), the only significant answer is *to be seen* in the work itself."

Marcia Tucker
*Associate Curator*

*Like anyone else, I have been the victim, on occasion, of* realistic illusion. *At the period when I was writing* The Voyeur, *for example, while I was trying to describe exactly the flight of sea gulls or the movement of waves, I had occasion to take a brief trip in winter to the coast of Brittany. On the way, I told myself: here is a good opportunity to observe things "from life" and to "refresh my memory". But from the first gull I saw, I understood my error: on the one hand, the gulls I saw now had only very confused relations with those I was describing in my book, and on the other it couldn't have mattered less to me whether they did or not. The only gulls that mattered to me at that moment were those inside my head. Probably they came there, one way or another, from the external world, and perhaps from Brittany; but they had been transformed, becoming at the same time somehow more real* because *they were imaginary.*—Robbe-Grillet. *For a New Novel, Essays on Fiction*

These camels do not find their organization in the real world but are the result of my experience.

*...the incompatibility of the perception of lived reality with the perception of artistic form [calls] for a different adjustment of our perceptive apparatus.*—Ortega y Gasset

Imagination becomes clear when all fantasy elements are eliminated, and only precision remains.

The psychological experience of confrontation with the camel is the occasion to think about the nature of experience.

Surface incident *can be* controlled on a large scale.

The degree of surface incident articulated in my camels has different dimensions from camels in the "real world". The work refers only to itself, making the idea of similar objects being equal or replicas irrelevant to my concern.

I cannot imagine nor perceive a camel until it is completed.

Nancy Stevenson Graves
March, 1969

## Biography

Nancy Stevenson Graves, 164 Mulberry Street, New York

Date of Birth: December 23, 1940

Place of Birth: Pittsfield, Mass.

1961 B.A.—Vassar College, Major: English.

1964 B.F.A., M.F.A.—Yale University,
School of Art and Architecture.

1965 Fulbright-Hayes grant to Paris.

1966 Lived and worked in Florence, Italy.

1968 One-man exhibition, Graham Gallery,
New York, New York.

## Catalogue

Camel VI. 1968-69. Wood, steel, burlap, polyurethane, animal skin, wax, oil paint. 7½′ x 12′ x 4′.

Camel VII. 1968-69. Wood, steel, burlap, polyurethane, animal skin, wax, oil paint. 8′ x 9′ x 4′.

Camel VIII. 1968-69. Wood, steel, burlap, polyurethane, animal skin, wax, oil paint. 7½′ x 10′ x 4′.

Height precedes length and width.

March 24—April 30, 1969

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